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Norwegian Diplomat Faces Trial Today in Spying Case

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OSLO, Feb. 24 — The trial of Arne Treholt, a well-connected Norwegian diplomat accused of spying for the Soviet Union and Iraq, will begin here Monday.

The trial is expected to last at least five weeks and much of it will be held behind closed doors before seven judges.

The 42-year-old Mr. Treholt, who was head of the Foreign Ministry's press office at the time of his arrest 13 months ago, began his career as a journalist but later occupied a variety of positions that gave him access to secret information vital to both Norway and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

He is accused of various lesser offenses in addition to spying and could be sentenced to as much as 20 years in prison. He has admitted breaches of confidence during questioning by the police but is expected to deny that he was involved in any continuing espionage arrangement and that any of the information passed to foreigners could have harmed Norway or its Western allies.

The buildup to the trial has mesmerized Norway, which has endured several postwar spying scandals involving the Soviet Union. The nation was shocked when the dapper, outgoing Mr. Treholt was arrested at Fornebu Airport here on Jan. 21, 1984, with a briefcase full of classified documents. He was purportedly on the way to a meeting in Vienna with K.G.B. contacts.

The son of a longtime member of the Norwegian Parliament, Mr. Treholt was active from his student days in Labor Party politics. Later, although not officially involved with the party, he remained a prominent spokesman for views linked with its left wing, such as the belief that Scandinavia should become a nuclear-free zone and that Norway should not stockpile NATO weapons.

But nothing in his behavior had prepared Norwegians for the idea that his contacts with the Russians were any different than those of many Norwegians who favor a more open relationship with their Communist neighbor.

The picture that has emerged of Mr. Treholt from friends and press reports is that of a man who exuded confidence, inspired trust and was interested in almost anything that had to do with politics. "Arne Treholt was the perfect political man," said Aftenposten, a leading newspaper, in the most recent of the countless profiles the fascinated Norwegian news organizations have produced about him.

Mr. Treholt is reported to have been under surveillance by the Norwegian Secret Service since the late 1970's. When he was sent to New York in 1979 as counselor to the Norwegian Mission to the United Nations, the Norwegian security organization enlisted the aid of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in watching him. F.B.I. agents are expected to be among the 60 witnesses the prosecution will call during the trial.

Mr. Treholt gradually became known for a taste for high living. It is reported that he has admitted being paid \$50,000 by Iraq for information and other sums by the K.G.B.

The NATO information Mr. Treholt is suspected of passing to the Russians had to do with the location and extent of NATO stockpiles to be used in defending the northern flank of the alliance in the event of a Soviet attack. He had especially good access to such information and to highly classified material about Norwegian defenses in 1982 and 1983 when he was a student at the National Defense College.

Wide-Ranging Contacts Noted

Before that, as a top aide to Jans Evensen, a leading Norwegian official in trade and maritime matters in the 1970's, he was in a position to advise the Russians of Norway's negotiating position in the long-running, strategically sensitive dispute over the dividing line between the two countries in the Barents Sea, which lies across the path to the Atlantic Ocean from the Soviet Union's naval bases in the Kola Peninsula.

More importantly, according to many Norwegians, Mr. Treholt's wide-ranging contacts allowed him to provide the Russians with an exceedingly well-informed insider's view of Norwegian politics and policy debates. It is assumed that the Soviet Union used the information in its continuing efforts to persuade Norway to reject its NATO ties in favor of a regional neutralism embracing Finland, Sweden, and Denmark, a NATO member.

Mr. Treholt's arrest has led to unusual sensationalism in the Norwegian press. Tabloids published his letters to his 6-year-old son from prison and Kari Storaeke, his estranged wife, has rushed into print with a book, "Bon Voyage to Paris," that details the impact on her life of the arrest.